

Judson, Adoniram (1788-1850) | History of Missiology

Pioneer American Baptist missionary in Burma



Born in Malden, Massachusetts, the son of Adoniram Judson, Sr., a Congregational clergyman, and Abigail (Brown), Judson graduated from Brown University (B.A., M.A.) and in the first class of Andover Theological Seminary (1810). His interest in missions began in 1809 when he read [Claudius Buchanan](#)'s sermon "The Star in the East." With ministerial friends he started the Society of Inquiry, a seminary study group on missions. In 1810 he was licensed to preach by the Orange, Vermont, Congregational Association preparatory to the pastoral ministry; however, he had strong inclinations toward overseas missions. In June of that year, Judson, [Samuel Newell](#), Samuel Nott, Jr., and [Gordon Hall](#) presented themselves to the Massachusetts General Association for missionary service, and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) was formed as a result. Following an unsuccessful attempt to secure an appointment from the London Missionary Society in England, Judson persuaded the ABCFM to support three couples and two single men on a mission to the East. Judson was the lead candidate of the first commissioning service for the American overseas missionaries held at Salem (Massachusetts) Tabernacle on February 6, 1812.

Following a sendoff with great fanfare, Judson and his bride, Ann (Haseltine), sailed with the Newells for India in 1812. During the four-month voyage, the

couple carefully studied the baptismal positions of the English Baptists in order to controvert the Baptist position; however, when they arrived at Calcutta, they adopted Baptist principles and were baptized by [William Carey](#). Upon their change of sentiments, the Judsons resigned from the ABCFM and plans were laid for the creation of a Baptist mission society in the United States.

By order of the British East India Company, the Judsons were forced to leave India. Surreptitiously escaping to Rangoon, Burma (Myanmar), in 1813, they established a station that became the first mission of American Baptists. Their work included evangelism and Bible translation. In 1842, following completion of Judsons's first dictionary, the couple relocated to Ava, to establish greater influence with the government. However, Adoniram Judson was charged with being an English spy and was imprisoned in June 1824. In a 21-month period of incarceration during the Anglo-Burmese War, he suffered from fever and malnutrition and underwent a forced march. As a result of the courage and resourcefulness of his wife, he was released in February 1826 to serve as a translator for the Burmese government during negotiations for the Treaty of Yandabo. Ann Judson died of complications of smallpox later the same year.

To enlarge his efforts, Judson moved his mission to Moulmein in 1828. There, with the assistance of [Jonathan Wade](#), he built a church and school and continued work on the Burmese Bible, which he completed in 1834. Later that year, he married Sarah Hall Boardman, widow of George Dana Boardman and a gifted linguist and teacher. In 1845, following the birth of their eight child, Sarah's health declined and the Judsons embarked for the United States. Sarah died en route; Judson completed the trip and remained in the United States for nine months' furlough. While his strength had been greatly reduced and he suffered chronic laryngitis, he was hailed as a hero throughout the Christian community.

While at Madison University in upstate New York, he met and married Emily Chubbock, a writer and educator. They returned to Burma in 1846 for continued work on an enlarged Burmese dictionary, which was finished in 1849. Shortly afterward, Judson contracted a respiratory fever and, attempting to travel to a better climate, died at sea.

Brackney, William H., "Judson, Adoniram," in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 1998), 345-46.

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Bibliography

A scrapbook collection including letters from Adoniram and Sarah Judson to Nathan and Eliza Brown is in the archives of the Boston University School of Theology Library. See links to letters below (in "Digital Texts").

Digital Texts

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Portrait

"Adoniram Judson." In Judson, Edward. *The Life of Adoniram Judson*. New York: Anson D. F. Randolph & Company, 1883.

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<https://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/i-k/judson-adoniram-1788-1850/>